



Poliomyelitis (*Polio/infantile paralyzes*)

What is Poliomyelitis?

- ❖ Poliomyelitis is a **viral** disease, damaging in severe cases the motor nerves, which activate movement.
- ❖ It is characterised by acute flaccid paralysis (AFP – paralysis with a loss of motor movement, where the muscles are soft and limp and the limbs remain soft and supple) in severe cases.
- ❖ Incubation period is from 1 to 2 weeks.
- ❖ Symptoms are initially throat and gastrointestinal infections, resembling the early stages of influenza. 95 % of infections are without symptoms at all and patients recover completely from these mild and asymptomatic polio infections.
- ❖ In severe cases the next stage of muscle paralyzes develop with symptoms such as muscle pain and stiffness in the back and neck.
- ❖ In some cases the polio virus can infect the muscle tissue that is necessary for breathing and this could be fatal.
- ❖ People that are most susceptible to the polio virus are children. Therefore the alternative name for polio is infantile paralyzes.

How is Poliomyelitis transmitted?

- ❖ The polio virus is excreted in the throat secretions or the stools of infected people from just before the symptoms appear and until several weeks thereafter.
- ❖ It is highly contagious and transmitted by person-to-person contact.
- ❖ In cases of poor personal hygiene, it can spread though the faecal oral route.
- ❖ Drinking contaminated water rarely spreads polio.

How can Poliomyelitis be treated?

- ❖ There is no cure for polio, only the symptoms can be treated.
- ❖ The best control of polio is through prevention.
- ❖ Immunisation is only effective if given prior to infection.

How can Poliomyelitis be prevented?

- ❖ Confer immunity by injection of inactivated polio vaccine or the oral intake of live attenuated oral polio vaccine.
- ❖ Do not drink untreated water.
- ❖ Polio viruses are easily destroyed by chlorination. Therefore, treat your drinking water by adding one teaspoon of domestic bleach to 20 litres of water, leave for at least one hour before drinking. Otherwise boil the water vigorously for 5 minutes and simmer for 15 minutes afterwards to disinfect the water.
- ❖ Maintain immaculate personal hygiene, proper sanitation and use clean drinking water containers

Reference: DWAF (2003). Management of water-related microbial diseases, RSA

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